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ABSTRACT

The 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics assessment contained a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Each student participating in the assessment received two 25-minute sections of questions. Most civics questions measured both knowledge and intellectual skills. In addition, some questions measured participatory skills and/or civic dispositions. This packet presents sample questions and student responses from the 1998 civics assessment for grades 4, 8, and 12. Student performance on each question is associated with one of the three achievement levels: (1) basic; (2) proficient; or (3) advanced. In addition, each question is accompanied by a table that indicates, for multiple-choice questions, the percentage of students within each achievement level who responded correctly, and, for constructed-response questions, the percentage of students within each achievement level whose responses were scored "acceptable" or better. The correct answer for each multiple-choice question is indicated. The topics covered in the highlights include: (1) "NAEP in a Nutshell"; (2) "The NAEP 1998 Civics Assessment"; (3) "Grade 4 Sample Questions and Responses"; (4) "Grade 8 Sample Questions and Response"; (5) "Grade 12 Sample Questions and Responses"; (6) "Results and Responses for the Nation"; (7) "School and Home Factors Related to Civics"; and (8) "Other Publications and Related Materials." (LB)

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NAEP 1998 CIVICS Report Card Highlights

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The strength of America's constitutional democracy comes largely from the informed, active participation of its citizens, whether voting in an election, spending time on jury duty, volunteering for community service, or simply keeping aware of current affairs. Will the next generation of citizens — today's students — have the knowledge, skills, and interest to fulfill their civic responsibilities? The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation's only ongoing survey of what American students know and can do in various academic subjects, is one resource that can help answer this question.

The NAEP is administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) with oversight by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). In 1998, NAEP administered a civics assessment to a national sample representative of all students at grades 4, 8, and 12. The results of the assessment provide information about students' civic knowledge, skills, and interests.

This publication presents highlights from the 1998 NAEP civics assessment, describing its content and major findings, as well as students' experiences at home and school that are associated with achievement in the study of civics.

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NAEP IN A NUTSHELL

Q: What is NAEP?

A: The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the nation's only ongoing assessment of what students know and can do in various subject areas. A project of the National Center for Education Statistics within the U.S. Department of Education, NAEP has assessed many academic subjects since its inception in 1969, including mathematics, science, reading, writing, world geography, U.S. history, civics, social studies, and the arts.

The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), an independent agency that oversees NAEP, determines which subjects will be assessed and how they will be assessed. With the assistance of educators, parents, public leaders, and other concerned citizens, NAGB develops the "framework," or guidelines, that determine how a subject area will be assessed. In addition, NAGB sets achievement levels, or student performance standards, for the three grades assessed — 4, 8, and 12.

Q: How is student performance reported?

A: The results of student performance on the NAEP are reported for various groups of students (for example, fourth-grade female students, twelfth-grade students attending nonpublic schools). The differences in performance between groups of students in 1998 that are discussed in this report are statistically significant.

Student performance is described in two ways: 1) scale scores, and 2) achievement levels.

Scale Scores

Student performance is reported as an average score based on the NAEP civics scale, which ranges from 0 to 300. The average scale score reflects the overall civics performance of a particular group of students.

Achievement Levels

Student civics performance is also reported in terms of three achievement levels: *Basic*, *Proficient*, and *Advanced*. Results based on achievement levels are expressed in terms of the percentage of students who attained each level. The three achievement levels are defined as follows:

Basic: This level denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.

Proficient: This level represents solid academic performance for each grade assessed. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.

Advanced: This level signifies superior performance.

Q: How should NAEP Achievement Levels be interpreted?

A: The achievement levels are performance standards, adopted by NAGB as part of its statutory responsibilities. The levels are collective judgments of what students should know and be able to do for each grade tested. They are based on recommendations by broadly representative panels of classroom teachers, education specialists, and members of the general public.

As provided by law, the Acting Commissioner of Education Statistics, upon review of a congressionally mandated evaluation of NAEP, has determined that the achievement levels are to be considered developmental and should be interpreted and used with caution. However, both the Acting Commissioner and NAGB believe these performance standards are useful for understanding trends in student achievement. They have been widely used by national and state officials, including the National Education Goals Panel, as a common yardstick of academic performance.

NOTE: For reasons of confidentiality, the students shown in the photographs in this report are not NAEP civics assessment participants.

THE NAEP 1998 CIVICS ASSESSMENT

In 1998, NAEP assessed the civics achievement of students at grades 4, 8, and 12. The guidelines used to develop the assessment were established in the *Civics Framework for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress*. The framework, published by the National Assessment Governing Board, was developed through a national consensus-building process that gathered input from a variety of citizens. Educators, assessment experts, scholars, public officials, businesspeople, and other laypeople, including students, all participated in this process.

The civics framework focuses on interrelated components: knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills, and civics dispositions. Together, these components make up the essential elements of civic education in America.

What civic knowledge should students be able to demonstrate?

According to the framework, the civic knowledge that students should be able to demonstrate can be found in five fundamental areas:

1. Civic life, politics, and government
2. Foundations of the American political system
3. How the government established by the Constitution represents the purposes, values, and principles of American democracy
4. The relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs
5. The roles of citizens in American democracy

What civic skills should students be able to demonstrate?

Students should be able to demonstrate the skills that enable citizens to use their civic knowledge to respond to the challenges of life in a constitutional democracy. Intellectual skills help citizens identify, describe, explain, and analyze information and allow them to evaluate, take, and defend positions on public issues. Participatory skills enable citizens to monitor and influence civic life by working with others, expressing ideas, and managing conflict.

What are civic dispositions?

Civic dispositions are those ideals held by citizens, such as belief in the rights and responsibilities of individuals in society and in the advancement of the ideals of the government. These "dispositions" underlie participation in civic affairs, such as elections or community service and the assumption of personal, political, and economic responsibilities.

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Content of the Civics Assessment

The 1998 civics assessment contained a combination of multiple-choice questions and constructed-response (or open-ended) questions. Each student participating in the assessment received two 25-minute sections of questions. Most civics questions measured both knowledge and intellectual skills. In addition, some questions also measured participatory skills and/or civic dispositions.

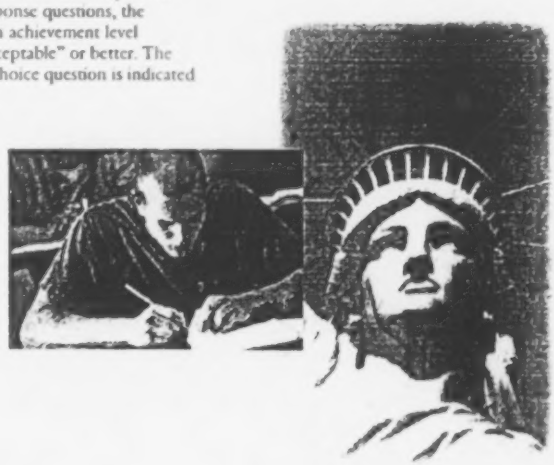
In order to ensure that the civics assessment conformed closely to the framework, a special committee of civics teachers and other educators reviewed each question being considered for use in the assessment.

The assessment included questions that test the civic knowledge areas outlined in the framework. At grade 4, about one-quarter of the questions focused on civic life, politics, and government, while at grades 8 and 12, there was more emphasis on the Constitution. At all three grades, at least a quarter of the assessment's questions dealt with the roles of citizens in American democracy.

Percentage of civics assessment time devoted to different areas of civic knowledge, grades 4, 8, and 12

	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 12
I. Civic life, politics, and government	21	18	15
II. Foundations of the American political system	22	28	23
III. How the government established by the Constitution represents the purposes, values, and principles of American democracy	15	26	29
IV. The relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs	10	14	20
V. The roles of citizens in American democracy	32	24	23

The following pages present sample questions and student responses from the 1998 civics assessment. Student performance on each question is associated with one of the three achievement levels — *Basic*, *Proficient*, or *Advanced*. In addition, each question is accompanied by a table that indicates, for multiple-choice questions, the percentage of students within each achievement level who responded correctly and, for constructed-response questions, the percentage of students within each achievement level whose responses were scored "Acceptable" or better. The correct answer for each multiple-choice question is indicated by a star (★).



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 Civics Assessment.

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GRADE 4 SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Basic Level – Sample Question and Response

Scott wants to be a police officer when he grows up. He says the police get to wear fancy uniforms with badges, use handcuffs, and drive cars as fast as they want. What is wrong with Scott's ideas about why he wants to be a police officer?

He thinks he gets to be big and powerful because he gets to brake the rules of others.

Think about the things police officers do in their work. What are two good reasons to be a police officer?

1) You discipline people so they can learn from their mistakes.

2) Make peace between people that are fighting and fix the problem.

67% of all 4th graders received a rating of "Acceptable" or better.*

Percentage of students at each achievement level who received a rating of "Acceptable" or better		
Basic	*Proficient*	*Advanced*
71%	87%	◆

* The percentage of all fourth graders includes those who were below *Basic*.
◆ Too few fourth graders reached the *Advanced* level to report the results for this question.

This constructed-response question was designed to measure students' ability to tell the difference between power and authority. The response shown received a score of "3" ("Acceptable") on a four-point scale and represents the *Basic* level at grade 4. Although the first part of this response was not credited because its meaning was unclear, both reasons the student gave for being a police officer were credited.

Proficient Level – Sample Question

11. Which of the following is the most important reason why the United States trades with other countries?

- Ⓐ People get a chance to travel.
- ★ Ⓑ It helps people get the things they need.
- Ⓒ It helps us learn about other cultures.
- Ⓓ We can learn other languages.

49% of all 4th graders answered this question correctly.*

Percentage of students at each achievement level who answered correctly		
Basic	*Proficient*	*Advanced*
49%	70%	◆

* The percentage of all fourth graders includes those who were below *Basic*.
◆ Too few fourth graders reached the *Advanced* level to report the results for this question.

This multiple-choice question measured students' understanding of international trade. While reasons A, C, and D may result when the United States trades with other countries, reason B is clearly the most important. Fourth graders at the *Proficient* level were likely to choose the correct response.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 Civics Assessment.

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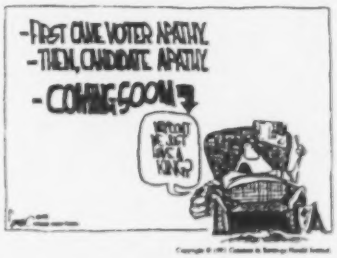
GRADE 4 SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Advanced Level – Sample Question

The following question refers to the cartoon below. The word *apathy* in the cartoon means "not caring."



What is the message of the cartoon?

★ Ⓓ Democracy could be in danger if people do not vote.

Ⓐ People like to get all of their political ideas from television.

Ⓑ People do not care whether they have the right to freedom of speech.

Ⓒ It is hard to be a candidate for President.

95% of all 4th graders answered this question correctly.*

Percentage of students at each achievement level who answered correctly		
Basic	*Proficient*	*Advanced*
26%	35%	◆

* The percentage of all fourth graders includes those who were below *Basic*.
◆ Too few fourth graders reached the *Advanced* level to report the results for this question.

This fourth-grade question required students to interpret a cartoon about the importance of civic participation to democracy. Answering this question correctly requires students to both understand a political cartoon — a difficult task for young students — and respond to a question about a sophisticated concept. Fourth graders at the *Advanced* level were likely to choose the correct response.

GRADE 8 SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Basic Level – Sample Question

Two countries both claim that an island in the Pacific Ocean belongs to them. The countries are preparing to go to war with each other over this issue.

What is the United Nations able to do to help end the conflict?

Ⓐ Send weapons to both sides.

Ⓑ Disarm the militaries of both countries.

★ Ⓒ Arrange for diplomatic negotiations between the two countries.

Ⓓ Force all other countries to stop trading with the two countries.

77% of all 8th graders answered this question correctly.*

Percentage of students at each achievement level who answered correctly		
Basic	*Proficient*	*Advanced*
84%	94%	◆

* The percentage of all eighth graders includes those who were below *Basic*.
◆ Too few eighth graders reached the *Advanced* level to report the results for this question.

This eighth-grade question falls within the civics knowledge category of the United States and its relationship to other countries and to world affairs. It was designed to measure students' understanding of what the United Nations can do to help resolve international conflicts. Eighth graders at the *Basic* level were likely to choose the correct response.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 Civics Assessment.

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GRADE 8 SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Proficient Level – Sample Question

This question refers to the passage below:

> When two [people] come into [the Supreme] Court, one may say: "an act of Congress means this." The other may say it means the opposite. We [the Court] then say it means one of the two or something else in between. In that way we *are* making the law, aren't we?
>
> —Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court

Some people are troubled by the role of the Court described by Chief Justice Warren. Which argument could they effectively use against it?

★ Ⓐ It is dangerous to give nonelected officials such as judges so much power in the government.

Ⓑ The Supreme Court makes it too difficult for the federal government to exercise its power over the states.

Ⓒ Supreme Court judges are the members of society most capable of making decisions about social policy.

Ⓓ The main task of the Supreme Court is to rewrite the Constitution to respond to modern problems.

31% of all 8th graders answered this question correctly.*

Percentage of students at each achievement level who answered correctly		
Basic	*Proficient*	*Advanced*
26%	56%	◆

* The percentage of all eighth graders includes those who were below *Basic*.
◆ Too few eighth graders reached the *Advanced* level to report the results for this question.

This eighth-grade multiple-choice question was part of a two-question set about the distribution and sharing of powers among the three branches of the federal government. It required students to demonstrate an understanding of conflicting views about the power of the Supreme Court. Eighth-grade students at the *Proficient* level were likely to choose the correct response.

Advanced Level – Sample Question and Response

Give two specific examples of how the United States Constitution limits the power of the government.

1) Through separation of powers.

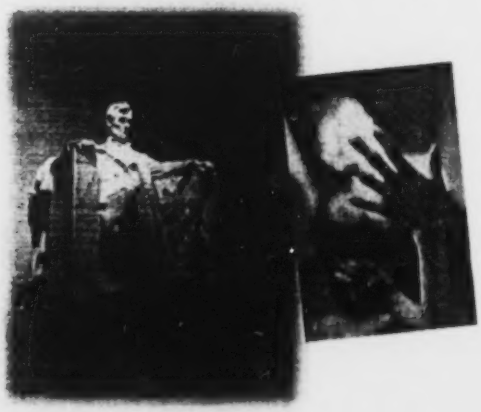
2) Through Judicial Review.

13% of all 8th graders received a rating of "Complete."*

Percentage of students at each achievement level who received a rating of "Complete"		
Basic	*Proficient*	*Advanced*
10%	29%	◆

* The percentage of all eighth graders includes those who were below *Basic*.
◆ Too few eighth graders reached the *Advanced* level to report the results for this question.

This constructed-response question measured students' understanding of ways the United States Constitution limits the power of government. This response received a score of "3" ("Complete") on a three-point scale because it provided two different and specific correct answers. It represents the ***Advanced*** level at eighth grade.



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 Civics Assessment.

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GRADE 12 SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Basic Level – Sample Question

This question refers to the statement below:

> The United States is not a fully democratic country. The framers of the Constitution created a system in which majorities — even large majorities or their representatives in Congress — do not have the right to do anything and everything they want.

The framers of the Constitution wanted to limit the power of majorities in order to

- Ⓐ encourage the growth of political parties
- Ⓑ ensure that state governments would remain weak
- Ⓒ enable the government to act quickly in times of crisis
- ★ Ⓓ protect the rights of individuals and minorities

70% of all 12th graders answered this question correctly.*

Percentage of students at each achievement level who answered correctly		
Basic	*Proficient*	*Advanced*
78%	93%	97%

* The percentage of all twelfth graders includes those who were below *Basic*.

This multiple-choice question, which measures civic knowledge about the foundations of the American political system, is the second of a two-question set based on a short statement. It deals with the idea that the Constitution upholds majority rule in certain key areas of decision-making, but limits the power of majorities in order to protect the rights of individuals. Twelfth-grade students at the *Basic* level were likely to choose the correct response.

Proficient Level – Sample Question and Response

This question refers to the passage below:

> "Absolute arbitrary power, or governing without settled laws, can neither of them be consistent with the ends of society and government."
>
> — John Locke

List two ways the American system of government is designed to prevent "absolute arbitrary power" and "governing without settled laws."

1) The system of checks and balances prevents a certain branch of government from getting too powerful.

2) The amendment process allows laws to be added or altered to fit the best needs of citizens

95% of all 12th graders received a rating of "Complete."*

Percentage of students at each achievement level who received a rating of "Complete"		
Basic	*Proficient*	*Advanced*
24%	51%	75%

* The percentage of all twelfth graders includes those who were below *Basic*.

This constructed-response question was designed to measure students' understanding of how the Constitution benefits American society by limiting the power of government. The response received a score of "3" ("Complete") on a three-point scale because both parts mention aspects of America's constitutional system that are designed to prevent "absolute arbitrary power" and "governing without settled laws." It represents the *Proficient* level at twelfth grade.

Advanced Level – Sample Question

This question refers to the statement below:

> The United States is not a fully democratic country. The framers of the Constitution created a system in which majorities — even large majorities or their representatives in Congress — do not have the right to do anything and everything they want.

Which aspect of the American system of government shows one of the limits on the power of majorities discussed above?

- Ⓐ The ability of Congress to override presidential vetoes
- ★ Ⓑ The Supreme Court's power to overturn unconstitutional laws
- Ⓒ The right of Congress to impeach Presidents and federal judges
- Ⓓ The ability of people in many states to vote public initiatives into law

30% of all 12th graders answered this question correctly.*

Percentage of students at each achievement level who answered correctly		
Basic	*Proficient*	*Advanced*
20%	42%	85%

* The percentage of all twelfth graders includes those who were below *Basic*.

This twelfth-grade multiple-choice question was intended to measure students' understanding of the constitutional limits on the power of majorities, as well as students' ability to interpret a statement. In the assessment, this question was paired with another question that asked why the framers of the Constitution wanted to limit the power of majorities. Twelfth-grade students at the *Advanced* level were likely to choose the correct response.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 Civics Assessment.

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NAEP Civics Assessment Results for the Nation

Civics Achievement Levels

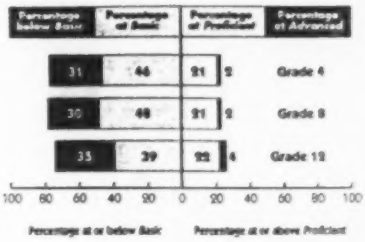
Percentage of students at or above the civics achievement levels

Nation			
Below Basic	At or above Basic	At or above Proficient	Advanced
Grade 4			
31	69	23	2
Grade 8			
30	70	22	2
Grade 12			
35	65	26	4

As shown on the left, 23 percent of fourth graders, 22 percent of eighth graders, and 26 percent of twelfth graders were at or above *Proficient*—the level identified by the National Assessment Governing Board as the standard all students should reach.

While the table on the left shows the cumulative percentages of students "at or above" each achievement level, the figure on the right shows the percentage of students who fell below the *Basic* achievement level and those within the *Basic*, *Proficient*, and *Advanced* levels.

Percentage of students within each achievement level range



NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100, or to the exact percentages at or above achievement levels, due to rounding.

Civics Performance by Gender

The NAEP civics scores at each grade (4, 8, and 12) range from 0 to 300, with a national average of 150. These scores can be used to compare various subgroups of students.

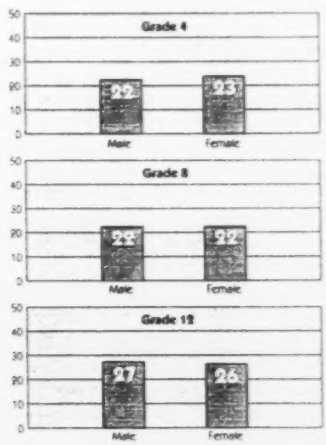
At grades 8 and 12, females had higher average scores than males. At grade 4, females appear to have higher average scores than males, but this difference was not statistically significant.

Average civics scores by gender

Grade 4	
Male	149
Female	151
Grade 8	
Male	148
Female	150
Grade 12	
Male	148
Female	152

At all three grades, comparable percentages of males and females reached or exceeded the *Proficient* level of civics achievement.

Percentage of students at or above the *Proficient* achievement level by gender



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 Civics Assessment.

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Civics Performance by Race/Ethnicity

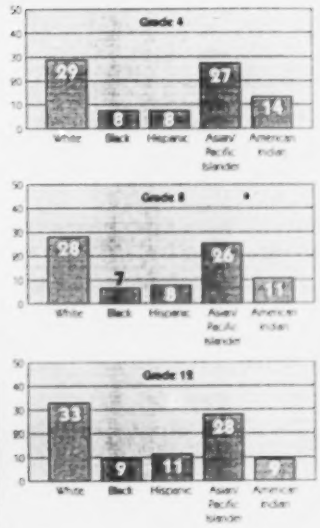
At grade 4, White students had higher scores than Asian/Pacific Islander students who, in turn, outscored Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students. In addition, Black and American Indian students scored higher, on average, than Hispanic students. At grade 8, White students scored higher, on average, than Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students. Black students and Asian/Pacific Islander students also scored higher than their Hispanic peers. At grade 12, White and Asian/Pacific Islander students had higher scores than Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students.

Average civics scores by race/ethnicity

Grade 4	
White	159
Black	132
Hispanic	126
Asian/Pacific Islander	153
American Indian	137
Grade 8	
White	159
Black	133
Hispanic	127
Asian/Pacific Islander	153
American Indian	134
Grade 12	
White	158
Black	131
Hispanic	130
Asian/Pacific Islander	151
American Indian	129

At each grade, higher percentages of White students were at or above the *Proficient* level than Black, Hispanic, or American Indian students.

Percentage of students at or above the *Proficient* achievement level by race/ethnicity



Civics Performance by Type of School

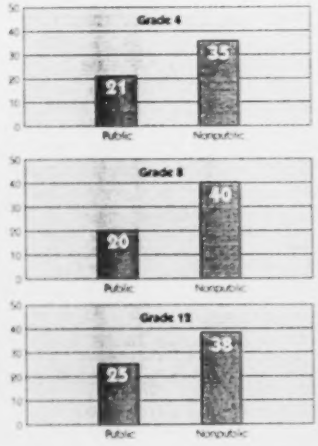
At all three grades, students attending nonpublic schools had higher scores than students attending public schools. Differences between the performance of students in public and nonpublic schools may be due to factors such as admission standards and the likelihood of greater parental involvement at nonpublic schools.

Average civics scores by type of school

Grade 4	
Public	148
Nonpublic	164
Grade 8	
Public	148
Nonpublic	169
Grade 12	
Public	148
Nonpublic	163

At each grade, a higher percentage of nonpublic school students reached or exceeded the *Proficient* level than did public school students.

Percentage of students at or above the *Proficient* achievement level by type of school



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 Civics Assessment.

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School and Home Factors Related to Civics

What activities are related to students' achievement in civics? Are there aspects of students' environments at home, school, or in the community that encourage or support the development of young citizens? NAEP collects information that may help researchers, educators, and parents answer these questions. For example, it may suggest approaches to help students become more active citizens and provide a resource for parents seeking to support their children's understanding of civics.

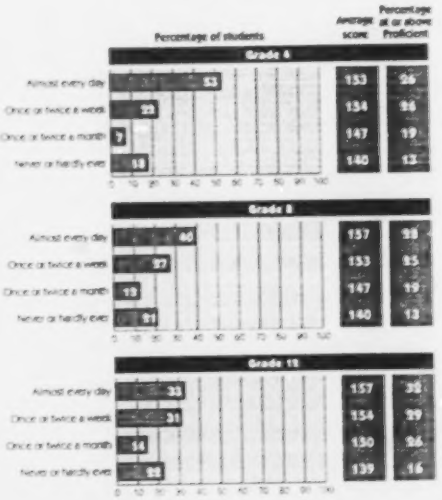
The data shown in the following figures are for students attending both public and nonpublic schools. While it is possible to study the relationship between students' performance in civics and various other factors, it cannot be established that these factors cause a higher level of achievement in civics. The relationship that exists between civics achievement and another factor may, in fact, be caused by a complex interaction of numerous factors.

Discussing Studies at Home

Students who participated in the NAEP 1998 civics assessment were asked how often they discuss their school studies (in any subject) with someone at home.

At all three grades, about two-thirds of students said they discussed their studies with someone at home at least once or twice a week. Furthermore, those students who said that they did so "Almost every day" or "Once or twice a week" had higher civics scores than those who said they did so less frequently.

How often do you discuss things you have studied in school with someone at home?



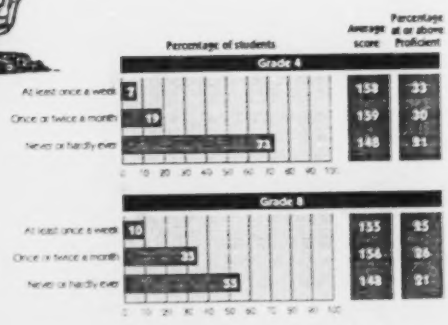
NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Use of the Internet in Civics Class

Is there a relationship between use of the Internet, a technology increasingly available in classrooms, and students' civics performance? Teachers of fourth- and eighth-grade students who participated in the assessment were asked how often their students accessed the Internet while in class.

As reported by their teachers, about one-quarter of fourth graders and nearly one-half of eighth graders used the Internet at least once or twice a month. At both grades, students who accessed the Internet in class once or twice a month had higher civics scores than those who never or hardly ever did so. Eighth-graders who used the Internet at least once a week also had higher civics scores than those students who never or hardly ever did so.

How often do your students access the Internet while in civics class?



NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 Civics Assessment.

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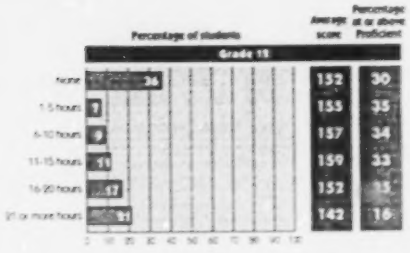
Student Jobs

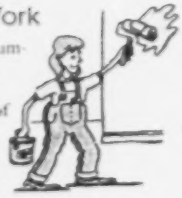
Many American high school seniors work at jobs for pay. Is there a relationship between the number of hours students work and their performance on the civics assessment? Twelfth graders taking the assessment were asked how many hours per week they work at a job for pay. Almost two-thirds of the students reported that they work at a job for pay; approximately one-fifth reported working 21 hours or more per week. Students who reported working a moderate number of hours per week (11–15 hours) had higher scores than both the students who reported working more hours and the students who reported that they did not work at a job for pay.

How many hours a week do you work at a job for pay?



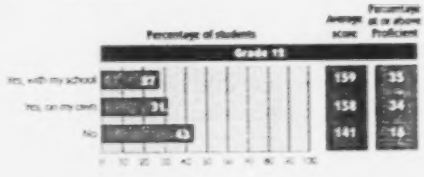
NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Student Volunteer Work



In recent years, an increasing number of young people have been active in community service. Such service can be a key part of an individual's civic education. Consequently, twelfth-grade students taking the 1998 civics assessment were asked whether they had volunteered for community service during the past year. More than half of the students said that they had done some volunteer work, either with their school or on their own. Although not shown by these percentages, some of these students may have done both types of volunteer work. Students who did volunteer work had higher average civics scores than students who said they had not done volunteer work in the past year.

Did you do volunteer work in your community this year?



NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 Civics Assessment.

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Report Card Highlights

Other Publications and Related Materials

For additional information and a full report on the NAEP 1998 civics assessment, read the ***NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card for the Nation***, available from the address listed on the right. Information on the ***Civics Framework for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress*** is available from the National Assessment Governing Board (http://www.nagb.org).

For information on ordering these and other NAEP publications, write:

U.S. Department of Education ED Pubs
P.O. Box 1398
Jessup, MD 20794-1398
or call toll-free 1-877-4 ED PUBS

Visit NAEP on the World Wide Web!

The Nation's Report Card Online offers a wealth of information including:

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